

The Mercy Tree at Golgotha

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Preacher: Andy Murray

[0 : 00] that we read and let's focus on verses 32 to 34.

Two others who were criminals were led away to be put to death with him and when they came to the place that is called the skull there they crucified him and the criminals one on his right and one on his left and Jesus said, Father forgive them for they know not what they do and they cast lots to divide his garments.

Now for the Christian there should be no more precious place in the world than the place of Golgotha, the place of the skull.

The reason that Golgotha is called Calvary is that the Latin translation of skull is Calveria, Calvary. It means the same thing, Golgotha and Calvary.

There are many places that I'm sure are precious to us this morning. Perhaps the place that we grew up or the place that we were born but there should be no more precious place to the Christian than Calvary or Golgotha.

[1 : 17] If you're a Christian this morning, Golgotha was the place where it all started for you. It was the genesis of your faith. Perhaps like me you heard sermons on the cross for years and it meant nothing to you but then one day the Lord opened your eyes and suddenly Golgotha became a precious place to you.

Golgotha is a place that the Christian wants to go again and again to strengthen his or her faith. It's the place where they see the love of God and Christ displayed in all its beauty and majesty.

And of course there's a tremendous paradox in Golgotha because as we've read this morning it's a place of despair and it's a place of death and it's a place of judgment and a place of justice but it's also a place of deliverance and mercy and love.

Golgotha is a place of conviction. It's a place where we first felt our sin but it's also a place of peace where we first sensed peace and reconciliation.

And the events surrounding the cross and the words of the cross have got so much to teach us and hopefully you've got a sheet in your new sheet with all the sayings of Christ from the cross all the seven different sayings of Christ from the cross.

[2 : 49] Matthew and Mark just have one saying from the cross My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? The fulfilment of Psalm 22 that we just sang there Psalm 22 verse 1 In Luke here we have three sayings Father forgive them for they know not what they're doing in verse 24 I tell you the truth today you'll be with me in paradise and Father into your hands I commit my spirit which we're going to look at tonight a fulfilment of Psalm 31 verse 5 And then in John we have three other sayings Dear woman, here is your son and son, here is your mother in chapter 19 I thirst which is the fulfilment of Psalm 69 verse 21 and it is finished which many people think coincides or ties in with the last words of Psalm 22 So four out of the seven sayings are direct quotes from the Old Testament and of course they are all fulfilments of passages such as

Isaiah 53 and Daniel 9 and Psalm 22 And the words of Jesus from the cross remind us that the cross is absolutely central to Christianity It seems like a tremendously obvious thing to say but in every generation there is an attempt to try and sideline the cross in Christianity We're living at a time when Jesus has been made into something somebody completely different from what the Bible presents him to be Some people are presenting Jesus as a social justice warrior Some people are presenting Jesus as an environmentalist or an eco-warrior But Christ first and foremost is a saviour and the cross is central to Christianity

As you read the Old Testament you're reading about a sacrificial system You're reading about a sacrificial system that is all about atonement sin passing over to an animal and being burnt and of course this is pointing all the way forward to the New Testament Each saying from the cross was a careful fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies And this morning I want to call our study on the cross the mercy tree because that's what we see at the cross we see the mercy tree We see at the cross Christ in his mercy seeking to forgive both his enemies then and now And I want to focus this morning on Golgotha and I want to notice three things First of all Golgotha was a place of despair and judgement

Secondly it was a place of death and justice but then thirdly I want to spend most of our time on Golgotha as a place of deliverance and mercy So first of all Golgotha as a place of despair and judgement from verses 26 to 31 of Luke 23 Luke Luke paints for us a very vivid picture of Christ's walk to the cross It's hard to think of a more traumatic or horrible walk that Christ made to Golgotha By this time Christ had been through various kangaroo courts He had been the victim of horrific injustice He had been beaten He had been mocked

He had been spat on A crown of thorns had been forced onto His head We know from the Old Testament that He would have been almost unrecognisable Blood would have been pouring down His head His back would have been lashed and bleeding And He stumbles to the cross We're told there that His cross was passed to Simon of Cyrene Somebody we don't know very much about but Mark records in Mark 15 the names of his two sons So perhaps Simon was a follower a disciple of Jesus We just don't know But perhaps out of mock pity the cross was handed to Simon And Luke tells us that we have behind Jesus we have these daughters of Jerusalem who are weeping and wailing and incredibly as Christ staggers to the cross what's on

[8 : 04] His mind what's at the front of Christ's mind as He staggers to the cross Well the incredible thing is that at the forefront of Christ's mind is mercy mercy If we'd just been beaten if we'd just suffered injustice if people were shouting abuse at us we would have been filled with anger we would have been filled with hatred we would have been filled at the very least with self pity but Christ is filled with mercy and Christ turns to these daughters of Jerusalem and He seeks to redirect their sympathy how does Christ seek to direct their grief He says do not weep for me but weep for yourselves and for your children and you see we see Christ as He walks to the cross in His role as a prophet

Christ of course was the perfect prophet priest and king but as we see Him walking to the cross we see Him in His role as a prophet He is warning these women He is redirecting their grief He says do not weep for me but weep for yourselves and for your children you see over the centuries many many people have wept over the sufferings of Christ apparently when Mel Gibson's film The Passion of the Christ was in cinemas people were coming out in floods of tears weeping over the graphic scenes that they had seen there's many people who have been in church who have wept over preachers who have graphically described the sufferings of Christ but you see as Leon Morris says Christ doesn't want their sympathy he wants their repentance it's very easy to weep over the sufferings of Christ but what

Christ wants is not their sympathy he wants their repentance and Christ brings this home by using two illustrations the illustration of the barren woman and of the mountains you'll be aware that Jerusalem was sieged in AD 70 the Romans ransacked Jerusalem and if we were to go over the graphic details of that siege this morning we couldn't even talk about some of the events that took place in that siege it was so horrible it was so graphic the things that were done to children and women was so horrific and Christ as a prophet is foreseeing in his mind these terrible events that are going to take place in 50 years time and far from being a blessing it will be a blessing not to have children in that day because of the horrible things that are going to take place the siege will be so horrible that it would be better to be buried alive by rocks and mountains can't think of anything worse than being buried alive but yet it would have been better to be buried alive than to experience that siege and of course

Christ is quoting the verses of Hosea chapter 10 verse 8 the high places of even the sin of Israel shall be destroyed thorn and thistle shall grow up on their altars and they shall say to the mountains cover us and to the hills fall on us Christ was foreseeing this horrible siege and he was saying don't weep for me weep for yourselves he was saying flee for refuge Matthew Henry says they that would not flee to Christ for refuge and put themselves under his protection will in vain call to hills and mountains to shelter them from his wrath and this reminds us that Christ is a saviour he's full of mercy he's full of wrath wrath but nobody else spoke more about judgment than Christ and Christ here is warning of judgment at the very apex of his great work of atonement what is Christ doing he is warning of judgment to come he is warning of judgment to come and then he quotes these curious words in verse 31 if they do these things when the wood is green what will happen when it is dry what do these words mean well what

Christ is doing here is he's comparing himself to green wood and he's comparing Jerusalem to the dry wood and what Christ is saying is there's a fire of judgment that is coming and it will consume those who think that they are getting away with Christ's death at the moment no sin will ever go unpunished John MacArthur says if the Romans would perpetrate such atrocities in Jesus the green wood young strong and a source of life what would they do to a Jewish nation the dry wood old barren and ripe for judgment you see Golgotha was a place of despair because it was a place of judgment and right to the end of Christ's life he was warning of this judgment to come and he was trying to direct his mourners to flee from that judgment so Golgotha was a place of despair and judgment but secondly

[14 : 19] Golgotha was a place of death and justice a place of death and justice and we see that in verses 32 and 34 of course Golgotha was the place of the skull it was a place where people came to die it was a place of destruction and where was Golgotha well Golgotha was outside the city walls what does that remind us of well of course what happened outside the city walls was where the sin offering was burnt the sin offering was an animal sacrifice outside the camp and of course everything around the crucifixion is full of symbolism the sin offering of course was pointing to Christ's ultimate sacrifice for sin and if we go back to

Exodus 29 verse 14 we read but the flesh of the bull and its skin and its dung ye shall burn with fire outside the camp it is a sin offering the sin offering was the accursed thing it was taken outside the camp and what Christ is saying he's saying I am the sin offering Hebrews 13 11 to 13 says for the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp so Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured everything sinful everything accursed was to be burnt outside the camp and Christ was saying incredible symbolism he was saying

I am the sin offering I am the sacrifice for sin and of course he wasn't just saying that he was a sin offering he was the fulfillment of Isaiah 53 verse 12 he was numbered with the transgressors he was between two criminals he was fulfilling every single prophecy of the Old Testament he was to die in shame and condemnation in the place of death and suffering and Golgotha of course was a place of incredible physical suffering and torture the crucifixion was the worst most excruciating way to die but we mustn't become too overly focused on the human suffering of Christ because of course Golgotha is meant to be a picture of humanity it was a place of death and shame but it was also a place where we see a picture of humanity what was ultimately happening at the cross again so many people have gone wrong because people talk about the cross today as some place of supreme sacrificial love and of course it is that some people talk about the cross as a place of inspiration a place that inspires us to greater love and service and sacrifice and of course it is all these things but ultimately the cross is the place of substitutionary atonement for sin

John 14:10 says and this is love not that we love God but that he loved us and sent his son to be a propitiation for our sins now the concept of propitiation is a very complicated thing to get our heads around but I think professor John Murray in his book Redemption Accomplished and Applied explains it incredibly well to us and if you go back to Genesis chapter 6 verse 14 we read of Noah and the ark and he says make yourself an ark of gopher wood make rooms in the ark and cover it inside and out with pitch and the Old Testament word for atonement is the same word that is used in that passage for cover propitiation is a covering for sin Christ covers his people by his substitutionary death

Christ at the cross was appeasing or satisfying the wrath and the justice of God he was covering his people by his blood by his righteousness and we mustn't get confused by propitiation that somehow Christ is twisting the arm of an angry God who is desperate to curse his people or curse sinners as Professor Murray says this propitiation is the fruit of the divine love that provided it the propitiation is the ground upon which the divine love operates and the channel through which it flows in achieving its end and as we look at the cross we see the sovereign purpose of God to save sinners God didn't save us because he was backed into a corner and the only way out was to save

[20 : 09] Jesus was to punish Jesus he saved us because it was his good pleasure and why did he save us is it because of some minor moral failing or some slight wrong thinking on our part Isaiah says all we like sheep have gone astray we have turned everyone to his own way and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all you see this morning every one of us are rebels we are God haters we are sinners and if you and I were at the cross we would have been right there at the front of the crowd spitting on Jesus mocking him and calling for him to be crucified that is why we need a saviour Matthew 15 verse 19 says for out of the heart come evil thoughts murder adultery sexual immorality theft false witness and slander and that offends us that offends our pride and the greatest problem today is not the environment ultimately the greatest problem is not housing it's not even poverty the greatest problem is your heart and my heart and that is why we need a saviour and if you are a

Christian this morning you will know that you will know that you are a rebel you will know that you are a transgressor and a sinner and that you deserve the justice and wrath of a holy God and that is why the cross is such an awful place because it is the place where we are cursed Jesus was cursed for our sin so Golgotha was a place of despair and judgment and it was a place of death and justice but the amazing thing this morning is that Golgotha was also a place of deliverance and mercy a place of deliverance and mercy and we just want to notice three things under this heading first of all it was mercy in the midst of murder mercy in the midst of murder and we come to the words of our text this morning father forgive them for they know not what they do the first words from the cross was a prayer and the last words from the cross were a prayer christ bookended his death with prayer and he died as he lived in a spirit of prayer every single aspect of christ's life was spent in prayer every great event every great crisis it was covered in prayer and here we have at the very start of his crucifixion he cries out father forgive them for they know not what they do if you or I were nailed to a cross and we had done nothing wrong and we had been beaten and we had been spat upon we would be calling for the fire of god to consume these people but what does christ do he asks his father to forgive them he calls for mercy this word forgive literally means to leave them do not punish them at this time christ is calling for his father to leave them to look over their sin at this moment and again we see the fulfillment of scripture from isaiah 53 yet he bore the sins of many and makes intercession for the transgressors and as royal says as soon as the blood of the great sacrifice began to flow the great high priest began to intercede we see christ as prophet and we see here christ as priest as soon as the blood of the great sacrifice began to flow the great high priest began to intercede imagine in his agony christ interceding for the very men that had nailed him to the cross what love what mercy he switches from warning of judgment to interceding for mercy what does it mean in verse 34 for they know not what they do what does that mean well I think what it means is that the crowds were being whipped up into a frenzy by these religious leaders the scribes and the

Pharisees were whipping them up into a frenzy to crucify Jesus but they were not they didn't have a full understanding of exactly what they were doing they didn't truly understand that Christ was the son of God or the Messiah and as one of the commentators said if ignorance does not excuse a crime at least it diminishes the intensity of it what they were doing they were doing to some degree in ignorance their leaders their teachers they hadn't taught them well from the Old Testament they hadn't taught these passages like Isaiah 53 and Sam 22 so they were in ignorance as to what they were exactly doing but yet Christ calls to his father to forgive them for they know not what they do and you see God's display God's wrath was on display as at no other time in history and Jesus is crying out for it to be turned away from his murderers and mockers and as Ryle says if we want warrant and encouragement to repent and believe the passage before us surely supplies enough if you want encouragement to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ this morning surely this passage gives you that encouragement so we see mercy in the midst of murder but also we see a powerful prayer in the midst of doubt in verse 34 what a remarkable prayer Christ gives from the cross we would be filled with self pity and with vengeance if it was us but Christ is full of mercy and as Octavius Winslow says as it's got in your new sheet so completely was Jesus bent upon saving sinners by the sacrifice of himself he created the tree upon which he was to die and nurtured from infancy the men who were to nail him to the accursed tree what a mind-blowing thought that Christ as the creator created the tree on which he was to die and created the men on which were to murder him Jesus formed the very men that were driving the nails into his hands such was he bent on our salvation and how was Christ's prayer answered how was this prayer answered well we don't know these are part of the mysteries of the cross as Ryle says we have probably not the least idea how many of the conversions to God at Jerusalem which took place during the first six months after the crucifixion with a direct reply to this marvellous prayer but suddenly the things begin to happen don't they the penitent thief is converted the centurion is converted a couple of months later three thousand are converted on the day of Pentecost these prayers these prayers Christ's prayer is answered in a miraculous way so we see a prayer in the midst of doubt but then at last we also see mocking in the midst of majesty verses 35 and 38 mocking in the midst of majesty and we see this rather squalid display of the gambling over his clothes as if

the pain and the shame of Golgotha weren't enough christ is crucified naked they take his clothes off him and again this is a fulfillment of psalm 22 verses 17 and 18 where the soldiers cast lots for his garments and what incredible blindness we have amongst the religious leaders that they can't see all the different fulfillments of christ's faith from the old testament the jews shout at him in verse 35 he saved others let him save himself if he is the christ of god his chosen one little did they know that the whole point of the messiah was that he would be pierced for our transgressions and he would be crushed for our iniquities the whole mosaic system was pointing forward to this moment isaiah 53 daniel 9 psalm 22 all of them were predicting a substitutionary atonement on the cross and yet they were blind to it notice the different way in which the jews and the romans mock jesus the jews of course were mocking jesus because he was as they saw a helpless messiah unable to help himself and yet the romans were mocking him in a different way they were mocking him because he claimed to be king of the jews if you are king of the jews save yourself see the romans saw this king with no army and with no crown and with no kingdom as they saw it and they were mocking him for being a useless king the jews scoffed at his claim to be messiah and the gentiles mocked his claim to be a king and you see of course with both of them both with jew and gentile the cross would prove to be a stumbling block as it says in first corinthians one verse thirteen so we see mocking in the midst of majesty so as we come to a conclusion this morning we have seen at the cross that sin demands justice yet sinners need forgiveness how can these two irreconcilable things be reconciled how can justice and mercy be reconciled at the cross at the mercy tree yes it was a place of despair and judgment and yes it was a place of death and justice but it was also a place of deliverance and mercy it was the ultimate fulfillment of psalm 85 verse 10 mercy and truth are met together and righteousness and peace have kissed each other mercy and truth are met together and righteousness and peace have kissed each other only at the cross can these things be reconciled the justice of god and the forgiveness of sinners and this morning you deserve the wrath of god you deserve the justice of god just like me but christ has made a way of salvation if anyone sin we have an advocate with the father jesus christ the righteous and he is the propitiation for our sins and not only ours but also for the whole world thomas

gulfrey the great philanthropist here in scotland used to preach in that text and he said god has thrown a zone of mercy around the world we are in a zone of mercy at the moment and the big question for us this morning is how will we respond to the cross is golgotha a place of no interest to you this morning or is golgotha a place of preciousness golgotha is a place of invitation it's a place of salvation christ said come unto me all you that labor and are heavy laden and i will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn of me for i am meek and lowly in heart and you shall find rest unto your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light if you're carrying the heavy burden of sin this morning the place where you need to go is

[34 : 35] Golgotha a place of deliverance and mercy a place of love and a place of invitation for weary sinners a place where we deserve the justice and wrath of God but instead we receive his mercy will you come to that place this morning will you come in faith and repentance and receive the finished work of Christ with the empty hands of faith let's bless oh god bless his word let's pray lord we thank you this morning for Golgotha we thank you lord to those of us who are in christ it is the place of great preciousness it was the place where it all started for us lord it was the place where we first saw our sin in all its ugliness in all its horribleness and we thank you oh god that christ experienced the awfulness of our sin so that today we can experience the mercy tree we can experience the love of christ and we pray lord that if there's anyone here today who still hasn't experienced your salvation that lord you would pierce their hardened heart that you would open their darkened mind and that lord they would experience the love and mercy of the lord jesus christ we pray lord that you would impress upon their heart that a day of judgment is coming much worse than the siege of jerusalem and that lord that you would turn them from that awful day to the day of mercy we thank you lord that you have cast a zone of mercy around this world and we pray lord that you would bless us as a church as we seek to go forth with the gospel into a new week help us lord to speak to our neighbours and to our family to our workmates help us lord to be beacons of light and grace in our workplaces in our neighbourhoods and our families lord speak powerfully we pray through our lives and our words to a dying world lord our society our communities are broken they are they are in utter confusion we as a nation oh lord are stumbling from confusion and crisis to confusion and crisis and lord we pray for mercy upon our land we pray that lord you would come and help us to see our sin and our need of christ lord come by your holy spirit in convicting and converting power help us lord as a nation once again to feel a sense of shame for the sins that we are perpetrating day after day lord we have lost our corporate sense of shame we think that we can do anything and be anything without any consequences and lord day by day we are seeing the consequences of your judgement upon our land oh lord deliver us from ourselves we pray in wrath we pray remember mercy lord bless your word to us today we pray bless us as we close in praise and take us we pray to our homes in safety for all we ask it in jesus name amen let's conclude our service by the words that we mentioned in psalm 85 psalm 85 in the scottish psalter on page 340 those wonderful words that we quoted truth met with mercy righteousness and peace kissed mutually truth springs from earth and righteousness looks down from heaven high we'll sing we'll sing verses 6 to 13 of psalm 85 and we're going to sing to the tune st leonard

psalm 85 verses 6 to 13 and we'll stand to god's praise psalm 86 for us toxics hits strokes
uns track■■■■ and i'll jump you and i'll and the side you